

Workshop Title: Business of Livestock- Make your Livestock Make Money

Speaker(s) & their title(s): Tim Livingstone of Strawberry Hill Farm
<http://www.strawberryhillfarm.ca>

Executive Summary:

Tim Livingstone and his family raise and sell beef, pork, chicken, eggs and over 50 different vegetable varieties from their farm. Strawberry hill farm is one of the few in the Maritimes that has organically certified both their vegetables and meat products.

Livingstone explains that the diversity works to their advantage and provides recommendations for incorporating livestock into your farm.

Detailed Notes:

Why livestock?

- Holistic approach to farming
- Meat sells itself, can't meet current demand
- Makes up 15% of their income
- Work all year round, which helps retaining good employees
- Builds fertility
- Using waste material in the form of culls etc. for pigs
- Meat helps sell vegetables - attracts new customers

Try to balance costs so they are 50% of retail price.

- Feed costs - from pullet to laying
- Cost of buying new chicks
- Processing cost
- Not including labour, tractor or overhead costs

Then factor 25% (or less) of retail cost going to labour and at least 25% for the farm

Feed:

- Number one reason that is preventing people from raising organic livestock
- More options are becoming available
- Mixing your own feed is an option - Tim lives near Speerville Flour Company and receives spare grains and hulls.

Chicken feed rations: (it is important to build a strong robust birds prior to laying)

- Buy a mineral mix – Bioegg, or
- Provide enough corn for energy (modern breeds)
- Chick starter has high levels of corn, use for first 3-4 weeks
- Finish with less corn and more oats
- Layer ration has more calcium
- Too many vegetables can cause issues when the birds substitute these for eating protein
‘do not feed more vegetables than they will eat in 20 minutes’
- water

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Pigs:

- Provide vegetables
- Nipple drinker for water

Acquiring organic livestock:

- Chicks must be organic from day one – antibiotics are not acceptable but vaccinations are often approved.
- Chicks should be given roots and dirt to build their own antibodies within the first 3 days. Sawdust floor is not recommended for young chicks because they will eat it. Tim uses newspaper on the floor where he keeps his chicks.
- Pigs must be raised organically from the last trimester of gestation. To get started you may need to provide organic feed to another farmer, where a pregnant sow could birth organic piglets. Once you have your own stock, it is possible to raise your own piglets.
- It is recommended to cut boar tusks to prevent injury to other animals.
- Tim does not recommend having a sow birth only one batch per year; Livingstone believes it may be better to raise 2 litters per year. There are mixed thoughts on this topic however so it should be researched.

Chicken Housing at Strawberry Hill Farm:

- In summer a hay wagon is converted to a mobile chicken coop with a car shelter assembled on top (of the wagon) and nesting boxes built into the sides
- One-inch square wire mesh is used on floors so droppings pass through.
- Roosts are built inside with 1-inch wide branches.
- An electric net fence is placed around the house to protect the birds from predators
- Tim recommends moving the coop at night, when the birds are tucked in with the door closed.
- Larger (stationary) housing can be built inside a greenhouse frame.
- In winter the chickens are housed in an insulated portion of the barn, and a window is opened on warmer days for ventilation

A Note on Collecting Eggs:

The nesting boxes on Tim's coop are built so that the floor is angled slightly and accessed from an outside hatch. Chickens walk over a carpeted area to clean their feet, and the eggs roll gently to the access hatch for easier collection.

Pig housing:

- Outdoor pens are good even in winter
- Straw is good for bedding
- Be careful that electric fencing is working if snow covers the line.

Fencing and Transportation Considerations:

- Electric
- Wood posts

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- Metal panels
- Keep animals out of the vegetables, double strand fencing is needed.
- Trailer/transportation
- Loading
- Ability to sort and load
- A straight shoot is much easier to use and doesn't make animals turn a corner. Dark trailers can be intimidating, so a light can be used to make the loading situation less stressful.
- Provide snacks on the trailer at different times during the season to 'practice' loading.